

## **CENTRE BALOU POUR PERSONNES AVEC HANDICAP MENTAL**

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo mentally handicapped persons are often considered bewitched, witches, or sorcerers and are outcasts. Centre Balou is one of very few institutes created solely for the purpose of aiding mentally handicapped persons in this country. The center was brought into existence in 1980 with the purpose of providing schooling and shelter for this marginalized part of the society. It has since developed its capacity, and they presently care for 126 people, including 25 adults on a large property outside of Lubumbashi.



Through the Ambassador's Special Self Help Fund, the center has increased its capabilities by constructing a workshop where handicapped people can learn basic manual trades. The contribution was used to purchase necessary materials to construct the workshop along with bricks made on the property. The workshop provides the community with greater skills and opportunities.



In May of 2007 Ambassador Meece visited the newly constructed workshop, and received a warm welcome by the director Mrs. N'dua and others at the center. The workshop was not operational at the time.



In August of 2007 Chris Corkey of the Economic Section and Carrie Gyskiewicz of the Consular Section of U.S. Embassy Kinshasa visited the operational workshop. The shelter was full of both youth and adults enthusiastically constructing wooden chairs and boxes as well as clay figures.



